

'Veronica's Room' -- nasty little shocker without shocks at Colonial

By Kevin Kelly
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"Veronica's Room," at the Colonial, means to be a nasty little shocker but only succeeds in being nasty, very nasty. Its small measure of shock is over in a quick flat second and what's left in the mind after playwright Ira Levin has desperately tried to fill 80 minutes playing time is the standard obstacle with mysteries like this: Why? As Mr. Levin has recently shown in his suspense-less, slipshod novel "The Stepford Wives," he is a good man with an outline but both predictable and empty when it comes to the moment of telltale conclusion.

Having said all this, I'm

not sure how to continue. "Veronica's Room" has one of those plots everyone is fervently requested not to divulge (supposedly "for the enjoyment of future audiences"). Since I don't want to be put under the hex of "Rosemary's Baby" (another of Mr. Levin's works), I'll do my best to comply, at least by side-slipping the play's main revelation. The story is set in a large, gloomy, room with barred windows, in a house in Walpole, a house furnished circa 1930. The time, however, is the present. A young girl, a BU student is asked to imper-

sonate a dead girl she resembles. For reasons I'll leave unspecified, she agrees. A frenzied attempt is made to rattle her into the dead girl's identity, but it fails. And Mr. Levin moves in for the . . . err, ah . . . kill.

As momentarily engaging as the plot seems to be (the ritual role-playing is faintly reminiscent of Genet, faintly that is), it soon begins to flounder. While Mr. Levin is fairly ingenious with detail and humor, he finally gives no insight into the awful malevolence lurking in the tormented psyches of his

antagonists, who number three (sorry to be so specific). It turns out too easily that their troubles agitate from their genes and, if I'm being as cagey as I think, you'll probably have to see the play to fully understand that sentence.

What must be blankly accepted is a curse of insanity that includes sibling rivalry, incest, murder, necrophilia and kidnapping. It's not that I find these ailments dramatically unbelievable. They're as old as Aeschylus and as recent as the sadomasochistic mass murders in Houston. But in both of these in-

stances, Greek tragedy and current news, there has been some attempt made in explaining behavioral psychology. Mr. Levin simply settles for the pathologic strain, without defining it.

Under Ellis Rabb's direction, the play is well performed, although peculiarly without any real

terror. Eileen Heckart, Arthur Kennedy, Regina Baff and Kipp Osborne are the cast and three of them play dual roles (I'm being cagey again). Miss Baff gives what might be mistaken for a virtuosic performance, except she occasionally overdoes it and sometimes can't be understood. Incidentally, the

name Mr. Levin has given her is phonetically close. I believe, to the name of a coed recently murdered, a coincidence he would eliminate.

"Veronica's Room," for all its elaborate detail, is dramatically spare. It's not so much that the room lacks a view as it is that the view is severely limited.

Arthur Kennedy
 in "Veronica's Room"

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